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ABSTRACT

The four articles in this monograph are concerned with why it is important to teach composition and with identifying the characteristics of "good" writing. The first article presents an argument for a curriculum that stresses many kinds and purposes of writing so as to produce writers who respond with freedom and diversity to a variety of writing situations. The second article offers a definition of "good" writing: writing that affects its audience. The third article concentrates on transactional writing--the writing that instructs or informs--and the final article stresses the importance of the writing process in students' sense of self and sense of power. (FL)

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THE "WHY'S" OF TEACHING COMPOSITION

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PHILIP L. BRADY, editor

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INTRODUCTION

For the last few years, there has been considerable coverage of the "literacy crisis" and the declining scores of students on national, standardized tests of verbal ability. While a growing number of people question the existence of this crisis (or, if they accept its existence, question its magnitude), it has served to generate a renewed interest in the teaching and the evaluation of composition in our schools. New and important research aimed at accurately describing the development of writing ability is constantly appearing, adding to our information about what skills students learn at specific stages in their growth as writers, and helping us to plan the teaching of these skills at appropriate grade levels.

Responding to the increasing interest in composition and, specifically, to the questions of teachers who are engaged in teaching writing, the Executive Council of the Washington State Council of Teachers of English has decided to publish a series of monographs dealing with teaching composition. This monograph, the first in that series, addresses two basic questions: Why teach composition? What are the characteristics of "good" writing?

"Why teach composition?" This is the basic question which must be answered, at least provisionally, before any definition of "good" writing can be proffered. The answers to this "why" are also the basis for the "how's" which must follow, the "how's" which are the substance of what we who teach writing do in class each day. Before we can begin to teach our students to write effectively, we need to consciously understand why we think that the ability to write is important.

And because many students are no longer

willing to simply accept our word that writing is "part of a basic education" or that writing "will be good for you in the future," the attempt to define explicitly the assumptions which we make about the value and the purposes of writing has direct implications for how we discuss writing in our classes. I think that it is worthwhile to justify our concern about written communication periodically, evaluating and demonstrating the ways in which writing has a direct impact on our students' lives, on all of our lives. Only then will we have reason to invest the time and energy necessary to teach them well.

Once the purposes of writing have been defined, it becomes possible to offer definitions of "good" writing. "Definitions," rather than "definition," because all writing is contextual; whether a specific piece of discourse is "good" depends--depends upon the writer's purpose, depends upon the writer's message, depends upon the writer's audience. The definitions of "good" writing which are offered in the following essays emphasize different aspects of the writing context. John Herum concentrates on transactional writing--writing which is informative, writing which moves the business of civilization. Peter Elbow stresses the impact of the writing process on students' sense of self and sense of power. Anne Gere defines "good" writing as writing which affects its audience, as writing which is "political." And Eugene Smith argues for curriculum which would stress many different kinds and purposes of writing, thus cultivating the writer who would respond with freedom and diversity to a variety of writing situations. All these authors agree upon the need to teach and to assess discourse in terms of its rhetorical situation; all agree that it is necessary to avoid the temptation to evaluate writing which simply shows know-

ledge of the conventions of correct punctuation and spelling as "good" writing.

Later monographs in this series will address more directly the matters of how we can teach writing in our classrooms:

A. Techniques for improving composition: What teaching methods and techniques help to improve student writing? How can writing programs be individualized to meet student learning needs? What is the relationship between proofreading skills and the composition process? Between formal instruction in grammar and writing ability?

B. Students as writers: What composition skills should every student possess? What are the implications of the NCTE monograph on students' rights to their own language for the teaching of composition? What causes lack of student interest and ability in writing?

C. Evaluation and assessment: What kinds of evaluation, both during and after writing courses, provide the most beneficial feedback to students? The most accurate assessment of their skills? What are some techniques for speeding up the assessment process? Can peer evaluation provide a useful alternative to teacher evaluation? How can we get students to write more and yet still allow teachers to assume a realistic workload? What is the role of evaluation in improving student writing?

D. The roles of others: What is the role of the principal in the development of composition skills? How can we broaden the concern and the responsibility for effective writing to include teachers in other disciplines?

The Council hopes that those who read this monograph will find the ideas and attitudes to be informative and challenging. It invites responses to these essays, and will publish replies in the WSCTE Newsletter. The Council also welcomes suggestions about the content of the future monographs.

Philip L. Brady

TO WRITE IS TO ENJOY

As a beginning teacher in an elementary school, twenty-five years ago, I suppose I was as conscientious and informed about writing as most other teachers. I was a liberal arts college graduate, with a major in English literature and a considerable love for the written word. Teacher certification courses had given me suggestions for organizing kids' practice with writing, and I certainly had no doubt that it was somehow important that kids write in school. But if anyone had asked me to explain why I assumed it to be important for kids to write or to elaborate on my reasons for giving certain writing assignments, I would have relied heavily on school conventions that I had unreflectively absorbed. And certainly the small school where I taught was as deeply saturated with convention as most others were (and still are).

Conventions; especially conventions about writing; they need questioning, if only because their hold on a teacher's mind can be so tenacious. Because of their strength, they can lead us--as I am sure in retrospect they led me--to impoverished teaching of writing. I am embarrassed to think about many of the writing demands I set for my fifth graders, even though at the time they seemed perfectly normal and the kids didn't protest any more than I had come to think was inevitable. After all, the conventional view went, school isn't supposed to be wholly enjoyable. Learning is often difficult, and writing, as a trainer of an exact mind, must necessarily cause some anguish and consternation. So, as my nineteen kids struggled through their penmanship

lessons (with straight pens and slow-drying ink), their weekly spelling routine, the fill-in exercises from the language arts text, and the written responses to textbook questions for science and social studies, I supposed that they and I were doing the right things. To have done otherwise would have upset everybody, even if I had had any quixotic motive for having them do otherwise. Oh, yes, there were a few times when I asked them to write stories--legends and tall tales--verse, and letters, but these were within the normal range so long as they didn't replace the other kinds of writing.

These writing activities seem to fall into four categories, as I now reflect on my incompletely realized motives for assigning writing. First and most tellingly for my naivete as a teacher, I told kids to write so as to fill up time and to keep them quiet. If they knew they had to turn in a piece of writing, especially one that wouldn't take me long to correct, they would be laboring for half an hour or more and, if I were sufficiently brutish in supervision, they wouldn't be talking very much or being otherwise obstreperous. And we teachers knew, of course, that a relatively quiet classroom must be a place where worthwhile learning was going on. No one seriously questioned that assumption. Furthermore, most of the kids seemed to feel that tangible written work, whatever its nature, was somehow a sign that they had accomplished something admirable. They were as much imbued as I with the mystique that learning is most respectable when there is something written to show for it.

I knew that kids ought to write so as to give me a basis for evaluation. I had to have something to show me the contents of their minds--the facts and concepts that comprised the curriculum which was, in effect, the textbook. We outlined the social

studies textbook; we answered the questions at the ends of science chapters; we labored with Friday spelling tests and other tests of memory. All of these writing assignments were heavily content-oriented, and I am sure I regarded them more as evidence of knowledge acquired than as ways of learning. If I had seriously thought of them as good ways of learning, I would have been appalled by their repetitiveness and sterility of appeal. But of course they seemed perfectly acceptable because I had done those same kinds of writing when I was in elementary and secondary schools. Besides, the teachers next door were doing the same things. We were all enveloped by convention.

Because I sometimes felt desperate to maintain order and to preserve a reputation for being in control of the class, I also used writing as a punishment. A few times I had them write the typical sentence admitting guilt and promising reform--twenty-five times, fifty times, a hundred times, whatever my anger and the severity of the infraction seemed to suggest. I didn't resort to having them copy out whole pages of the dictionary, as some of my own children's teachers have more recently done, but I shared the belief that it's okay to make an explicit connection between the act of writing and punishment. After all, when judges assign 1,000 word essays to juvenile offenders and when folklore approves of the association of writing and punishment, what would lead me to question the practice?

My fourth motive, which surfaced in my more benign moments and which nearly always led to pleasing results for everyone, was to use writing for enjoyment. Occasional stories and flirtations with verse and dialogue seemed a kind of diversion, one that we could permit ourselves only seldom. What were we really learning from writing such

things? Unless I combined them with a lesson on punctuation and checked all the spelling, it seemed that they were pedagogically dubious. In any case, there probably wasn't time for that sort of writing more than five or six times a year.

Clearly, all of these writing activities and my motives for assigning them were oriented toward written products. And this may be the weightiest tradition of all, so far as written composition in schools is concerned. I was preoccupied with matters of form. The kids' written products couldn't be good if they were rife with spelling errors, erratic punctuation, messy handwriting. The fact that most of the kids who had trouble with these elements of form in writing were also the ones who remembered information least well and who got facts and concepts on paper most poorly simply confirmed my judgment. It's the product that counts, and that's what a teacher should concentrate on.

Given my naivete at that time about how people learn to write and about the reasons for having them write in school, I can't feel that I was a hopeless failure as a beginning teacher of writing. But if I still held those beliefs or taught in a similar way, I would certainly merit scorn. Hundreds of writing assignments and thousands of student papers later--not to mention the books, articles, and conversations about writing that I have absorbed*--I think I have a much

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*Among the printed discussions of children's and young people's composing that have influenced me, some of the most important are: James Britton, Language and Learning (Penguin, 1970) and The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18) (London: Macmillan Education, 1975).

deepened understanding of composition and how it might best be taught. I can't deny that there is a lot about the composing process that still seems mysterious to me; collectively, we are still in the early stages of understanding the intricacies of how to help people compose. But the mysteries needn't obscure the outright errors and misconceptions that beset me and my former colleagues.

Two of the four motives I used for writing now seem indefensible under any circumstances. School writing is never legitimate simply to fill up time and to keep kids busy, however disguised by rationalization that motive may be. And writing as a means of punishment is akin to medieval torture in its morality and efficacy.

A writing assignment that amounts to little more than rote copying or that actually replaces the more active involvement of discussion or other manipulative learning activities stands condemned. Making such an assignment seems more likely a result of conventional school-keeping than of thoughtful design of learning. I still see the practice of assigning kids to read a chapter from a science text, say, and without discussion or any other means of aiding understanding, telling them to write answers to the questions in the text. I suppose the rational-

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John Dixon, Growth Through English (NCTE, 1969).
Janet Emig, The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders (NCTE, 1971).
Kenneth Koch, Wishes, Lies, and Dreams (Vintage, 1970).
Herbert Kohl, 36 Children (Signet, 1967).
James Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse (Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

ization is that the focusing of attention on answering the questions must somehow promote learning, but the likelihood of insightful learning through this kind of writing seems very low. How can any but the most superficial and sketchy answers arise from partially or mistakenly understanding concepts in the text?

Such writing probably seems to children to be a kind of punishment because of the inevitable frustration of trying to be correct when the content and the relationships are fuzzy in their minds. Assigned with any frequency, this kind of writing activity establishes many of the same associations between writing and punishment as the more overtly punitive writing assignments do. Any demand for purely repetitive writing ("I will not chew gum in school, and I will not disturb others with unnecessary talking") is indefensible because it is so readily completed mechanically and with a likely diffusion of resentment toward the autocrat who demands it and toward the act of writing itself. I doubt that many children who have struggled to meet such demands can later dissociate pain from writing. (Self-generated writing has its own inherent pains, but they result more from the internal struggle to link thought and feeling with linear verbal sequences than from external threats.)

What of the motive of using writing as a basis for evaluation of acquired information? In many schools, it seems that multiple-choice tests, teacher-made and standardized, are the principal means for evaluating. If such tests can assess the more significant levels of understanding and ability to think critically, they are preferable for young people to "essay" tests which offer little opportunity for deviation from "right" answers. If we want to observe the unique interpretation and significance

for individuals of ideas and information presented in a course, then the writing of "essays" (or expository discourse) has a credible function. But I doubt that the timed, in-class period for selecting, organizing, and spewing forth textbook information is anything but an anachronism of schooling. In short, the writing of sentences and paragraphs, as they have conventionally been assigned, is not a good way to evaluate understanding and application of knowledge.

My fourth motive for assigning writing was enjoyment--mine and the kids'. I saw that as a sort of luxury or diversion from the real business of school, and I failed to see how important it is as a reason for writing anything. Now, I see it as probably the most important reason for encouraging kids to write in school, particularly if school is supposed to contribute to a richer personal life and to facility with written language in various occupational and social situations.

What can it mean for children and young people to enjoy writing? I am well aware of the cries of incredulity that many adolescents utter if presented with enjoyment as the reason for writing. No way! they say. Unless forced to write, they claim, most of them would almost never do it. So what is a teacher to say? "Someday you'll need to know how to write, so you'd better learn it now." "Ability to write is the mark of an educated, literate person, and that's what you're in school for, so write." These are typical reasons which stress delayed reward and justify submitting to writing discipline. Such reasons are often closely tied to specific expectations about the written product--matters of organization, format, and style--hence, the accumulation of school lore about composition. That lore builds a set of arbitrary and remote expectations which force-

fully work against the possibility of students' seeing enjoyment as a principal motive. Convention and a too narrow concept of reasons for writing combine to make composition a neglected and hated school activity.

To see enjoyment as the central motive for writing may seem to over-simplify and to romanticize the writing act. It is so diverse in its nature among individuals and even within each individual. The occasions for writing in and out of school are so varied. And the needs for writing are so unpredictable. How can a motive as vague and generalized as enjoyment be taken seriously?

Suzanne Langer supplies a clear statement of and support for my premise. In Philosophy in a New Key (Mentor, 1951), she asserts as one of the most basic needs of humans the "need of symbolization." As other organs of the body have inherent, specified functions, so the brain has "its own law"; to transform or translate the data of direct sensory experience of the world into symbols, "which are our elementary ideas." (p. 46) Because the brain is specifically adapted for this activity and because the brain creates symbols spontaneously all the time, the uniquely human prerogative is to express ideas. Furthermore, the act of expression at the most fundamental level is its own reward. Langer assumes that talk, as the most readily accessible means of expression, is a response to an irresistible desire to express. But a huge array of other means and media of expression is available to humans; spoken, written, visual, kinesthetic, musical, and so forth. Some of them are readily adaptable to "practical" concerns of daily life; others seem to provide solely aesthetic results. Perhaps it is the specialization of the forms of symbolization of experience that obscures for many of us the more fundamental need that Langer cites. But

by discerning that basic need and its relationship to a rudimentary kind of satisfaction, we establish enjoyment as the root impulse of and reward for verbal expression.

Since I am concerned here principally with written verbal symbols, I need a way of connecting that root impulse to writing of young people in school settings. I recall efforts in professional articles of the 1950's to do that by dividing elementary school writing into "creative" and "practical." Creative writing consisted of stories, verses, and plays which children were to write freely and with little concern for the usual school conventions of format and organization. They were to experience the joy of creating patterns of words, expressing feelings and humorous ideas, and of sharing these writings with a delighted audience. "Practical" writing was oriented to the more serious business of school and the adult world: letters, reports, summaries, and the like. Here, concerns about format and organization were more stringent, and children were to learn the usual requirements of spelling, punctuation, and usage. It was also assumed that the practical side was the one to receive most emphasis in later school years, culminating in high school with tightly organized essays (often interpreted as five-paragraph essays with one prescribed structure) and in college with the research paper. In other words, the prevailing model was to make room for playful writing in elementary school and to become increasingly serious in later years. The effect was to allow enjoyment of expression as a kind of bait for the very young, but to withdraw or drastically circumscribe that motive at the onset of adolescence.

I now see this model as flawed and clumsy, but the acknowledgement of a "creative" side to writing is important. Recent and much more detailed thought about children

and adolescents' writing has improved on the model and amplifies the role of enjoyment. Some of this work has occurred in England and is reported in The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18). By drawing from this discussion of writing, I can show how the motive of enjoyment is approachable through a young writer's sense of functions of writing and audiences for writing.

Instead of implying that some writing involves creative activity and other writing an essentially different composition process, we should first divide writing into two broad categories which imply a relationship based on intention of writer toward subject and audience. If the language user intends to affect the events of the external world, s/he is deploying language in a participant role. Persuading someone to a course of action, giving directions, explaining reasons for events are among participant uses of language. If the language use seeks no outcomes in the world except for the satisfaction of commenting on some aspect of it, s/he is in a spectator role. Spectator language is its own end and needs no "practical" justification. This division, with sub-divisions of many degrees, causes us to look at school writing from a new perspective. Since it contains no inherent judgments of value and no implication that more or less creativity is involved in either major kind of language, the classification accommodates many kinds of writing and encourages attention to what the writer intends.

The next division of the participant/spectator distinction is three categories which more nearly imply certain writing forms and conventions that are culturally associated with them. Expressive language occupies the center between participant and spectator. It is the verbalization (in speech or writing) of the person's immediate preoccupations and

momentary moods, and therefore it usually avoids rigid external demands of form and is usually closely tuned to the immediate audience's responses. Because of its consistent importance as a means for togetherness, it is for most people the commonest use.

Transactional language moves toward the participant end of the scale, and its end is outside itself: to inform, instruct, or persuade. Poetic language moves the expressive toward the spectator function; it may use the traditional forms of poem, story, or play, but its essential patterning arises from the writer's feelings and ideas, and that patterning of language is a uniquely important part of its meaning.

Operating as a context for these categories of function and for particular language use situations is the audience for each. Unless the writer or speaker has a sense of audience, it is likely that the language will lack effectiveness. The audience need not be anyone beyond self in order to give momentum and direction to the language, but as the writer's sense of audience becomes vague or absent, the language becomes weak. We therefore need to accompany function categories with audience categories that will fit all probable language situations. These categories are self; teacher (often as uniquely trusted adult); wider known audience (a specific group whom the writer can address directly); and wider unknown audience (a vaguely defined "public").

With this classification scheme, which seems to me to include the most significant dimensions of discourse both inside and outside of school, I think we can appreciate the role of enjoyment in writing. A teacher first decides that expressive, transactional, and poetic functions are all legitimate and necessary means for satisfying the need to

symbolize experience. Accidents of custom or precedent may have made imbalance among them (e.g., heavy emphasis on report writing at certain levels) seem justifiable, and this very imbalance may have prevented kids from getting satisfaction from other functions. Or preoccupation with the expectations of certain kinds of audiences (e.g., the wider known audience of teachers at a higher level who are assumed to expect mastery of certain writing skills) may have arbitrarily narrowed the range of possible conventions of form.

Then, a teacher decides to present occasions for writing that draw from all or most of the function and audience categories. This variety of occasions will suggest to kids the many possible ways of using language to accomplish functions they can believe in. Specific writing assignments can provide several options for subject matter and for style and organization if the choice of audience is carefully considered. The teacher need not be the sole or principal audience for all student writing, both for theoretical and practical reasons. Conscious determination of other audiences and their likely needs and expectations can give a quality of genuineness and even urgency to writing which school writing has typically lacked. (I have suggested specific examples of such writing assignments in another article, "Composition Topics that Fructify," listed in Resources in Education, February 1978, and available through ERIC Document Reproduction Service.)

Recognizing that kids' composing processes need shaping and guidance, the teacher establishes a workshop setting often in the classroom. In the invention (or pre-writing) stage, for example, there is practice with questioning strategies. Kenneth Burke's Pentad offers five categories that imply questions to be asked about an event or

another piece of writing: ACTION (e.g., What happened? What is it? What does it say?); ACTOR-AGENT (e.g., Who did it? Who wrote it?); SCENE (e.g., Where did it happen? When and where was it published?); PURPOSE (e.g., Why was it done? What is its purpose?). Asking and answering these questions in small groups or in the class as a whole generates a great deal of information and opinion which is available for deciding what to say about a topic. Other sets of invention stimuli are also available and should be used extensively with kids to help them think about what to say. As most of us will admit, the hardest part of writing is getting started with enough ideas and relevant information. The standard tactic of telling kids to sit down and outline their ideas before they begin writing begs the question of how to get ideas. A teacher therefore needs to make extensive use of invention strategies with every composition assignment.

The next major stage in the composition process is arrangement, and again recent work in studies of composing suggests better strategies than formal outlining, the five-paragraph corset, or topic sentence/supporting details paragraph structure. Frank D'Angelo, in A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric and Process and Thought in Composition, relates categories of possible organization of exposition to thought processes that we all share to some degree, such as classification, exemplification, cause and effect, analysis. Each of these thought processes also suggests a most probable paradigm for organization. The most inclusive paradigm for classification, for example, is:

Introduction (includes thesis and class word)
    Type 1 (or Subclass 1)
    Type 2 (or Subclass 2)
    Type 3 (or Subclass 3) . . .
Conclusion (summary, return to beginning)

Frequent and patient in-class work with paradigms of organization can help kids to clear away some of the arbitrariness and mystery of organizing. They can gradually perceive an arrangement scheme that arises out of the unique organization that a given topic and intention (with respect to function and audience) suggests. The paradigm need not, however, be so inflexible or rule-bound as the five-paragraph structure or other all-purpose guides to organization.

Matters of style can also be a part of the in-class composing process, again decided and judged according to a careful perception of a particular function and audience for the writing. If kids can show early drafts to each other and to the teacher, get a variety of judgments which may lead to revision of style, and then produce a final draft that takes account of these judgments, they are getting support that many of them need in the complex act of composing.

The workshop setting should also extend to other kinds of audience response. Publication of some student writing in whatever forms are feasible gives an importance and permanence to writing which often acts as a powerful impetus to further writing. Sharing both published and unpublished student writing with actual intended audiences (sometimes outside of the classroom) and with audience surrogates (other kids responding as though they were the intended audience) should also happen often.

I believe that enjoyment of writing

naturally arises for many people out of composing situations that have the social context I have been describing. Not only does it provide several kinds of assistance in composing when they are most needed; it also make communication with others and exploration of one's own ideas and feelings the center of writing activity. Kids can therefore believe that learning to write is not simply a preparation for some vaguely perceived future need nor is it just a painful acquisition of "skills" whose justification seems wholly arbitrary.

A major problem for the teacher may seem still to remain. How will we evaluate kids' writing? Or, more specifically, how will we grade it according to standards which presumably distinguish good writing from poor or mediocre writing? There is help available here, too, from recent work, especially that reported in Evaluating Writing (NCTE, 1977). First, we need to distinguish summative evaluation (end of semester or course) from formative evaluation. The latter occurs in many ways, as supplied by teacher and other students, during the composing process described above. It is constructive criticism and need not involve a grade. A summative evaluation, I believe, is best made by a group of teachers working from criteria which they decide together and with anonymous, coded samples of student writing. It is possible to get high enough reliability from teacher-raters who have some training in composition evaluation to achieve fairness. Every school faculty should be using such a procedure to make regular judgments about the quality of its students' writing and should substitute it for individual teachers' independently arrived at grade determinations for writing.

These ways of handling the evaluation problem imply that "good writing" is not

rigidly definable. It is different depending upon the function categories--expressive, transactional, and poetic--upon the particular audience being addressed, and the stage of development of the writer. An evaluation plan that does not reflect this diversity of judgment criteria artificially limits sensitive judgment and misrepresents the nature of genuine writing. Furthermore, I suspect that rigid evaluation schemes have done more than almost any other school tactic to persuade kids that writing is a great risk and that punishment is more likely than satisfaction. And without satisfaction, why write?

Why <u>teach</u> writing, then? We teach writing to help kids see that words give shape and substance to fleeting experience and that writing is potentially one of the most satisfying ways of doing that. It combines the freedom of making our own meanings from our experience of the world with the discipline of fitting those meanings into forms that our culture has invented. To forget that broadly and intensely humane purpose in frenzies of concern about minutiae of form is to distort composition for ourselves and our students. Perhaps each of us needs to write often enough to recall vividly the satisfactions and strains of achieving yet another balance between that freedom and discipline. Only if you write often can you come to believe that to write is to enjoy.

Eugene Smith
University of Washington

WRITING: WHY AND WHAT

The first question posed by this monograph (Why teach writing?) leads directly into the second (What are the characteristics of good writing?), but before I follow this sequence I need to define my terms because they are slippery ones. The term "writing" can describe the calligraphy of first graders or the sophisticated prose found in the pages of The New Yorker; it includes giving directions, writing letters, describing an object or experience, persuading someone to accept a new idea, responding to literature and a variety of other forms of prose. "Writing" encompasses the four modes defined by traditional rhetoric--narration, description, exposition and argumentation--and transcends the artificial boundary between what has been called expository and creative expression. I'll get back to this artificial boundary later.

Although pressure for minimum competency achievement has pushed some of us to define writing as filling out forms and responding to multiple choice exams, I exclude this sort of writing from my definition because "writing" in my lexicon means fluent expression, not isolated bits of information. At the same time my definition of writing goes beyond what is traditionally called a "theme" to include dramatic monologues, advertisements, interviews, petitions, riddles, leaflets, and autobiographies. This is a representative but not exhaustive list of the varied forms which come under my definition of "writing." Despite their differences, these forms share the common quality of putting together or uniting disparate elements. Actually the

dictionary definition of composition--putting together a whole by combination of parts--comes closest to what I have in mind when I say "writing." Therefore I will substitute "written composition" for "writing" in this discussion.

Written composition consists, I believe, of two important activities: selecting and arranging. Selecting or choosing from parts or alternatives involves questions of both content and form; it means selecting an idea and a means of expressing it. Arranging or combining the parts is likewise an inclusive rather than exclusive activity; it goes beyond sorting pre-digested material into an effective sequence and includes developing and refining ideas. Together, selecting and arranging lead to a unified whole, a combination of parts from which neither the selection or arrangement can be extracted because they are wedded to one another. Without this wholeness or integrity there is no written composition, no "writing" as I define it. Answers on forms or multiple choice exams may involve some selection, but they never call for arrangement. Unedited journals and stream-of-consciousness accounts may demonstrate a variety of arranging strategies, but in their unedited form these materials evince no selection. Therefore both fragmentary answers to standardized questions and unedited sections of prose fall outside my definition of written composition as do other forms which fail to unite selection and arrangement.

In excluding unedited prose from my definition of written composition, I recognize that I am excluding a good deal of students' writing. As Peter Elbow and Ken Macrorie have demonstrated, the ability to write freely and honestly, to ignore the editing impulse, is essential in the early stages of writing. However, both Elbow and

Macrorie recognize that editing or selecting is an integral part of written composition. As Elbow puts it:

> Editing means figuring out what you really mean to say, getting it clear in your head, getting it unified, getting it into an organized structure, and getting it into the best words and throwing away the rest. It is crucial, but it is only the last step in the complete growth cycle.[1]

Without this crucial last step we do not have "writing" or "written composition" as I define them; we have raw material, often good raw material, but not written composition. Yes, we need to help students find ways to create their raw material, to learn that they can generate an infinite number of words. But at the same time we need to help them learn to cut, to discard, to strip away the unessential and find what they want to say. We must help them select and arrange their material into a whole, a piece with integrity.

There's that word again. "Integrity" keeps appearing in this discussion. While the word "integrity" does not have the diffuse meanings of words like "writing" and "teach," I want to explain my understanding of the term. For us of the post-Watergate generation, integrity connotes a reasonable degree of honesty, maintenance of some continuity between words and actions. This equation of integrity with morality is only part, and a lesser part, of the full meaning of the word. Derived from the Latin integritas--defined as wholeness, entireness, completeness--the word integrity means no element is missing, nothing is divided or broken. I think integrity describes written composition effectively because it implies an implacable unit where elements cannot be divided.

At the same time, the word integrity points toward one of the chief problems in students' written compositions. The writing section of the National Assessment of Educational Progress shows that lack of fluency, not mechanical errors, is the chief problem among young writers.[2] Ability to develop a coherent argument, to sustain discussion through an extended piece of discourse, appears to be one of our students' greatest deficiencies. A lack of wholeness, completeness (integrity?) plagues their writing. At the risk of wandering completely away from my definition of terms, I will assert that the practice of assigning two grades--one for content, one for mechanics--reinforces the lack of integrity in students' written compositions. To be sure, the A/C syndrome is not solely responsible for the absence of wholeness in written composition. We live, after all, in a world where record companies offer themes from symphonies with all the transitions left out, where television presents highlights of athletic events without showing the series of plays which lead to any climactic moment; where summaries of headlines masquerade as information on national and world affairs. When so many aspects of our culture lack integrity, it is not surprising that our students' written compositions do not emphasize wholeness and completeness. The two grade approach simply exacerbates the problem because it invites students to divide their writing, to avoid unifying selection and arrangement. Abandoning the double grade is one small way of showing students that written composition cannot be divided into two categories labeled "content" and "mechanics" or "ideas" and "usage." Abandoning the double grade can show students that written composition has integrity.

"Teaching" is another term which demands definition because it is so often taken for

granted. Teaching is teaching is teaching--or is it? We often make assumptions about what teaching means, and these assumptions remain largely unexamined. The danger of such unexamined assumptions is demonstrated by the mindlessness which, according to Charles Silberman in his Crisis in the Classroom, characterizes much American education. Unlike the term "writing" or "written composition," "teaching" cannot be defined in absolute terms. Teaching varies with the individual performing the act, but we can examine several general types of teaching to gain insight into individual styles. In so doing, we may confront some of the assumptions which underlie our teaching of written composition. In his book The University Teacher as Artist, Joseph Axelrod makes some distinctions which can be applied to teachers at all levels, and these distinctions can heighten our awareness of the myriad activities which fall under the general heading of "teaching." First Axelrod distinguishes between didactic and evocative modes of teaching. Didactic teaching stresses mastery of skills through repeated practice, it works particularly well in classes where an automatic or semi-automatic response is the desired goal, and didactic teaching assumes that the teacher is the ultimate authority. Didactic teaching rarely presents students with genuine alternatives, and problem solving and other forms of inquiry are not encouraged.[3] A didactic approach to written composition includes exercises on subskills such as spelling, vocabulary, punctuation and usage. Didactic composition teaching emphasizes a specific format such as five paragraphs in a theme, a topic sentence at the beginning of each paragraph, or a specific number of sentences in each paragraph. Didactic composition teaching may also require students to construct and follow an outline for each

composition, specify check lists or questions for students to complete before submitting a composition for evaluation, or offer standardized strategies for developing an idea.

My observation in Seattle area schools convince me that much composition teaching at the secondary level is in the didactic mode. Consider, for example, these criteria used for evaluating student papers:

1) Is the topic sentence clearly stated?
2) Is the paragraph well developed and organized?
   a. Does the paragraph contain one central idea only?
   b. Is the topic adequately developed or supported?
   c. Is the paragraph unified and coherent?
   d. Does the paragraph have continuity or smooth transitions?
3) Does the paragraph contain good sentence structure?
4) Is the word choice effective?
5) Is the paragraph free of errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling?
6) Is the treatment of the subject matter imaginative and thought-provoking?

With the exception of number six, all the criteria on this list suggest a didactic approach to composition teaching; mastery of prescribed skills will be rewarded with a high grade. In practice, even number six is often sacrificed to the skills approach because "effective" and "free of errors" often work against "imaginative" and "thought-provoking." For example, evaluation of one student paper subtracted points for "lots" in "lots of homework." Students are encouraged to adopt a formal register and use words such as "state," "vehicle" and "no longer tired of

seeing other people all of the time" instead of "say," "car" and "Now refreshed, I was once again happy to be with others." This equation of formality with "effective" nearly guarantees that students' written compositions will be neither imaginative nor thought-provoking. A number of individual teachers establish and use criteria such as those above, and their evaluation of student papers emphasizes formal register and mechanical correctness to the exclusion of more subtle and important qualities in writing. I am not saying that there is anything inherently wrong with the didactic approach to composition teaching but that it is insufficient by itself. If used exclusively, the didactic approach to written composition places emphasis upon insignificant, even inappropriate, aspects of written composition. Viewing composition as skills alone trivializes the complex process of writing, it can even represent written composition inaccurately. For example, number one in the list of evaluation criteria establishes the importance of a topic sentence. Many textbooks--those which take a didactic approach--likewise claim that good paragraphs use topic sentences. Yet, Richard Braddock's examination of expository writing revealed that fewer than half of the paragraphs in selected essays have explicit topic sentences, and an even smaller proportion have simple topic sentences as defined by composition texts.[4] Braddock's findings suggest that the didactic approach by itself can lead to inaccurate oversimplification of written composition. Clearly a single mode approach to teaching composition has severe limitations.

Enter another mode of teaching: Evocative teaching is the second mode defined by Axelrod. As Axelrod explains it, the central difference between didactic and evocative teaching is the evocative mode's emphasis

upon inquiry and discovery. Rather than being presented with a set of procedures or prescriptions, students are encouraged, even required, to consider alternatives, solve problems, and look to themselves as well as the teacher for answers. Axelrod subdivides the evocative mode of teaching into four prototypes: 1) subject oriented or "I teach what I know," 2) instructor oriented or "I teach what I am," 3) student oriented or "I train minds," 4) student oriented or "I work with students as people."[5] As the titles of the prototypes suggest, evocative teaching varies depending upon whether subject matter, instructor or student take the central place in class. Evocative teaching of written composition may focus upon heuristic procedures, free writing or other prewriting strategies designed to help students find what they want to say; it may focus on the instructor's own writing process or assumptions about the nature of writing; it may train students to become proficient editors of their own work or to draw upon their own experience and feelings for writing. In all cases, however, the student is encouraged to do more than accept passively or learn a set of skills. Evocative composition teaching may not be as wide-spread as didactic teaching, but it does occur in classes at all levels. I say this with confidence because I have examined school districts' definitions of writing competencies and find that many of them suggest a mixture of didactic and evocative teaching. Consider this one for example:

> 1) The writer communicates a purpose; for example, a request for a job, a description of an event, an explanation of fuel injectors, an image of a raindrop, proof of the dangers of clear-cutting.

2) The writer provides enough information so that the reader can understand if not agree.

3) The writer arranges material in an order that the reader can follow.

4) The writer constructs sentences in grammatical order.

5) The writer uses paragraphs to indicate divisions of the topic or changes in point of view.

6) The writer uses language appropriate to the reader and the situation.

7) The writer applies basic rules for capitalization.

8) The writer applies basic rules for punctuation.

9) The writer checks the final copy for correct spelling.

10) The writer attends to the appearance and legibility of the final copy.

This list divides evenly between items which call for didactic and evocative composition teaching. Numbers four, seven, eight, nine and ten, with their attention to skills of grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling and final copy imply that composition requires mastery of finite items. However, numbers one, two, three, five and six suggest the necessity for individual judgment. Purpose (number one) in school-sponsored writing is often determined by the assignment, but questions of selection ("enough information") and arrangement ("so the reader can follow") call directly upon student problem-solving

strategies. Likewise, student inquiry and judgment are required for decisions about paragraphing, for deciding when topics and viewpoints change. Number six implies perhaps the greatest decision making for the student writer because it suggests that a formal register or standard written English may not be appropriate for all readers and all situations, and the student must judge what is appropriate. Like "writing," then, "teaching" is a multidimensional term, which incorporates various forms of two modes.

In addition to removing some of the mindlessness attributed to American education, developing awareness of the multidimensional quality of teaching has particular importance to the teaching of composition. Recent research in composition shows the importance of rhetorical context upon student writing. James Britton et al. in Developing Writing Abilities (11-18) demonstrate the impact of audience and purpose or function upon the quality of students' written composition. Teachers shape much of the rhetorical context of student writing. Composition teachers either constitute or designate an audience, assignments (usually teacher-devised) generally dictate purpose as well as content, and form (most often the "theme") is nearly always determined by the teacher. Therefore as teachers become more conscious of their own assumptions about teaching, more aware of their teaching modes, they will be able to broaden the rhetorical context in which student writing occurs.

I have taken a long time to say what I mean by "writing" and "teaching," but having explained that, for me, both terms are multidimensional, that writing or written composition is a piece with integrity which results from selection and arrangement, that teaching appears in several modes, and that teachers' awareness of their own styles can have posi-

tive influences on the rhetorical context of the classroom, I can go on to explain why I think we should teach writing.

In their own right, the two processes which underlie written composition are essential to much of our students' lives. Whether in the supermarket or within their personal lives, students must continually select from an array of alternatives: Shall I buy this soap or that? Do I spend time with this person or that? In a society where advertising, certain social groups and some religions try to prevent people from making conscious choices, skills in making selections are especially valuable. Likewise ability to arrange, to establish priorities, to create patterns, can mitigate the confusing stimuli which beset all of us. But writing or written composition has value in itself; it is more than the fortunate result of two important subskills. Written composition exemplifies integrity to students who face a fragmented world. Writing provides a means of uniting, of making whole. Students who experience integrity in written composition may be able to extend that integrity to other areas of their lives. In addition to providing a model of integrity, written composition offers students a means of knowing themselves, of learning more about what and how they think. If teaching written composition proceeds evocatively rather than didactically, students' inquiry and consideration of alternatives will help them develop greater self-knowledge. Desire for self-knowledge motivates students of all ages, and the self-perception offered by writing is particularly powerful because writing calls for reflective and careful development of thought. I've known many students who claim, "I <u>have</u> to write. Writing helps me figure out what I think."

Finally, however, written composition

extends beyond the individual into the world. Integrity and self-knowledge are essential for the writer, but they take on larger meaning when written composition reaches an audience because the audience tests the integrity and reflects upon the self-knowledge expressed in written composition. This interaction between written composition and audience leads, if the written composition is successful, to some change in the audience. The change may be as minor as affirming the audience's opinion or as major as changing audience behavior. What I am saying is that we teach written composition because it has internal and external value for students. The internal values of integrity and self-knowledge need little amplification, but I want to say more about the external change which is also part of written composition. I claim that written composition provides students a means of changing their world, that if teachers employ evocative approaches to written composition, students will find political purpose in their writing. I use the word "political" in its broadest sense--to push the world in a certain direction, to alter people's ideas and ideals. For me, the strongest argument for teaching written composition lies in the political power it provides students as they begin to recognize that written composition doesn't operate in a vacuum, that it can and does change their environment.

As I said at the outset, an answer to the question: Why teach writing? leads directly into an answer to the question: What is good writing? Good writing has integrity, demonstrates the writer's self-knowledge, and can effect change. That is an easy answer, it follows logically, but it is not a satisfactory description of good written composition. The question remains: How can we identify good written composition?

In the face of pressures for easily-measured indicators of accountability, I think it is important to distinguish between adequate and good writing. As I have tried to show, good writing has more than mechanical correctness, but because it is easy to recognize, mechanical correctness often passes for good writing. Unless it is combined with other more important qualities, however, mechanical correctness identifies written composition as adequate rather than good. Adequate written composition can pass; it avoids outrageousness and doesn't offend, but adequate writing doesn't make any difference either. Adequate writing doesn't force writers to unify selection and arrangement, doesn't ask writers to plumb the depths of their own thinking, and doesn't raise questions or change minds and actions the way good writing does. But let me show rather than tell. Here are some examples:

Our Family's House

> Our family lives in a two story house. The house is brown. We have an upstairs and a downstairs. Our basement is not quite finished. We had just the upstairs when we had the house built. In the downstairs we have a storage room where we store all kinds of stuff, and we have another one under the stairs. Upstairs we have a clothes chute where you can drop clothes through to save time rather than walking downstairs. It is a lot of fun to drop clothes down below. My bedroom is upstairs. I have a nice view of a field and can see lots of different things. We have five bedrooms in our house.

Mechanically, this paragraph is flawless; it has a simple topic sentence, and there is

some variation in sentence structure. The student stays within the topic of the title and provides a number of details about the house. We could probably assume that the student who wrote this paragraph would perform satisfactorily on a standardized test of writing skills. Yet, I think we would agree that this is adequate, not good, written composition. In fact, there are some serious problems in this paragraph. Although the student has selected a number of details, the arrangement of these details lacks integrity, a fragmented rather than unified impression is created. The description of the clothes chute and the view from the bedroom suggest some self-awareness on the student's part, but no genuine self-knowledge is evident. Because the paper lacks integrity and self-knowledge, it cannot have political effect, it doesn't make a difference to us because we cannot be sure what matters to the writer.

Of course we can dismiss this paper because the writer is obviously immature. The sentences have little syntactic maturity--they are short, have little embedding and few patterns of subordination--and we might recommend some sentence-combining exercises for this student so that the first sentence might read: Our family lives in a two story brown house. Adequacy is not limited, however, to immature writing. Consider this more mature sample:

Interscholastic Athletics

> In my opinion interscholastic athletics is valuable among schools. It helps students get acquainted with the environment of other schools and it broadens their field of relationship. Not only is it good for social purposes, but it develops school spirit and enthu-

siasm that a good school should have to maintain a responsive attitude from the student body. Schools must have an outside interest other than schoolwork and the projects that evolve from it. If not, the students' participation and interest will die down. It is the responsibility of the school officers to provide an all-around content in their programs and interscholastic athletics is, I'm sure, an appropriate answer.

Here we have the mechanical attributes of the first paragraph without its weaknesses, and we can assume that this student has full command of the conventions of standard written English. Yet, I argue, this is adequate, not good, written composition. The paragraph lacks elaboration, the kind of elaboration that comes from real self-knowledge. The student is simply mouthing some standard phrases about schools and athletics and not examining the issue in any significant way. Because the writer remains uncommitted to the material, I am not persuaded, and for me the paragraph lacks political purpose. In fact, I find this a very dull paragraph; I am not interested in what it says because the writer does not seem interested. My point is that if we do not distinguish between adequate and good writing, if we don't insist upon good writing, we condemn our students to writing--and ourselves to reading--a long series of dull, trite and vague compositions.

In distinguishing between adequate and good written composition, I don't mean to imply that "good" is an absolute quality. In fact, I think that illusions of absolute goodness have dominated the teaching of written composition for too long. "Good" like "writing" and "teaching" is not a monolithic term but has a variety of meanings. Good written composition is defined by its rheter-

ical situation. That is, audience, purpose, form and writer all influence our assessment of "good." A fourth grader's letter to a principal is not "good" in the same way that a seventh grader's haiku is good, and the haiku's goodness differs from that of an eleventh grader's explanation of a hobby to a friend. Each of these written compositions has a set of characteristics which identify its rhetorical situation, and it is within this situation rather than upon an absolute scale that "good" is measured.

Early in this discussion I referred to the artificial boundary between what has been called expository and creative writing, and removing this artificial boundary completes my definition of "good." I repeat what a number of authors have affirmed: all writing is creative, there is no boundary between expository and other forms of writing. Creativity is evident in good written composition, composition with integrity, self-knowledge and political purpose. Rather than focusing upon abstract differences between types of compositions, we need to give attention to the rhetorical situation of actual written compositions. Assignments which specify audience and purpose for writing enable students to attach meaning to their compositions and facilitate teachers' evaluation procedures. If, in creating school-sponsored writing tasks, we give attention to the multidimensional qualities of writing, and give care to our design of rhetorical situations, we will have more "good" written compositions to read.

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Notes

[1]Peter Elbow, Writing Without Teachers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 38-42.

[2]National Assessment of Educational Progress, Writing Mechanics, 1969-1974: A Capsule Description of Changes in Writing Mechanics (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, Writing Report N. 05-W-01, October, 1975), pp. 43-55.

[3]Joseph Axelrod, The University Teacher as Artist (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1973) pp. 10-12.

[4]Richard Braddock, "The Frequency and Placement of Topic Sentences in Expository Prose," Research in the Teaching of English 8 (Winger 1974), pp. 287-302.

[5]Axelrod, pp. 12-41.

TRANSACTIONAL WRITING

I am concerned here with the unique power of the printed word and of writing modeled on print. That means I am not talking about the verbal arts--for they can exist without books, did exist without them for tens of thousands of years. All of the basic forms of verbal art are oral. They existed before writing was invented. They can all be found in germinal form in the activities of the pre-literate child. The notion that literature exists only in books is simply another shallow modernist error. If all the books in the world were burned and all the writing disappeared, people would still have poetry, story and drama. They are so profoundly basic to the human spirit, they will survive the next burning--if people survive.

Song is sturdy. Mere literacy, the foundation of civilization as we know it, is more fragile.

So, then, I am not talking about literature or its writing. Rather, I am talking about writing that does the work of a civilized world. In the terms of James Britton, this kind of writing is called transactional, the writing of a participant rather than a spectator.

> Transactional writing is intended to fit into; to articulate with, the ongoing activities of participants; poetic writing is a way of interrupting them--interrupting them by presenting an object to be contemplated in itself and for itself. Thus a piece of transactional writing--this present page for example-- may elicit the statement of other views, of counter-arguments or corroborations or modifica-

tions, and is thus part of a chain of interactions between people. A response in kind--another piece of such writing--is always a potential of transactional writing. Poetic writing, on the other hand, demands a "sharer," an audience that does not interrupt. . . .

This very broad distinction has an interesting corollary: what is contributed to the ongoing activity by a piece of transactional writing may well survive when the writing itself is forgotten. Thus, for example, Lindley Murray's English Grammar could be shown to have contributed ideas that are found in many succeeding grammars. It is in fact common practice for informative books to be brought up to date; over a period of years Kirk's Handbook of Physiology became Haliburton's, which in turn became McDowell's--and no doubt somebody else will substitute his name in due course. Can one imagine, on the other hand, Charles Dickens producing his version of Fielding's Tom Jones--to replace the original--and that in turn being rewritten by C. P. Snow?[1]

Books of transactional writing are not just kept, but they must be kept up. These are books meant to be modified, to be added to, to be built upon. It was to make this kind of book that writing was invented. Not for poetry, but for transactions.

Let me review why writing was invented and what it was used for--not because I think that its original uses are somehow more important than later uses, but only to note that such uses persist. I hope the historical review will do at least two things: (1) suggest connections and, therefore, sequences for writing programs and (2) add some more ideas to your store of justifications for spending so much time

teaching writing. During the review I will pause now and again to interject more personal comments regarding attitudes, materials, and school work.

Writing was invented to keep track of stored surplus, first of grain, then of other stored items; oil, wine, weaponry; the earliest written records we have are typically inventories. The first "books" were the kind an accountant would invent. The first function of literacy is, then, "to keep the books"--and the bookkeeper is the archetype for all of the professional managers that literacy engendered. The need to distribute stored goods accurately and to account for that distribution led to the first counting houses. It was in the counting houses of the early civilizations that arithmetic was developed and grew in power. It may be that commercial trade fostered by the surplus was the immediate stimulus that prompted writing. Whether for commercial trade or for distribution through some other means, it was the need to account for the stores that led to the invention of writing. As the societies grew more complex, the distribution of goods involved the distribution of land; and out of the need to distribute land accurately and to account for that distribution, the professional managers learned geometry.

The tools of arithmetic and geometry and the notion of being able to account for distribution of land and goods led to the notion that you can account for time and its distribution; and astronomy with its demands for an increasingly powerful mathematics was invented. (It may be that this story is too neatly sequenced. If Alexander Marshack is right, the earliest "written" symbols we know, those scratched on stones, signify astronomical events. That is, people may have been keeping track of the moon, if not the stars, even before they learned to trade

in grain.[2])

Since they were invented, none of these tools for distributing goods, land, and time have been lost. All are in use today in both their simple forms and in more complex forms. The yearly inventory of your local grocer goes directly back to the warehouses of Sumer. Our Western plains were surveyed and laid out with the geometry that Egypt developed. If you have a non-digital watch on your wrist, it uses a circle divided in exactly the way the Babylonians devised 3,000 years ago. When the earth was seen as a sphere, that system for dividing time became a way of dividing the earth--and every globe in every classroom is based on the early inventions needed to distribute and account for goods, space and time.

Before I continue with the story of literacy, let me pause and notice the features in the rise of writing that seem often missed in the writing assignments of the schools; having something put aside and having to account for it, having something to distribute and rules for doing it, having some authority and using counting to wield it--these are the features that mark the rise of writing. Preschool children seem to recapitulate these primal concerns when they play together. They will chant numbers to control themselves and the games, playing with the power the ancients learned to use. Some years back a linguist, Charles Fries, in Linguistics and Reading suggested that numbers should be left out of primary classes because the system of writing numbers differs radically from the system of writing other words. That is true, of course. Technically, our number system is "logographic,"[3] that is, a system like the Egyptian hieroglyphs or Sumerian cuneiform in which the separate symbols represent entire words. Our letter system is alphabetic, that is,

each symbol is supposed to represent a sound.

Fries suggestion was totally impractical. Numbers are too important to be left out. That they follow the oldest writing system, the logographic, seems somehow appropriate. That children play with the power of numbers is also appropriate. In rhythm they chant numbers to decide who is IN, and who is OUT, and who is IT.

One potato, two potato, three. . . .

If you teach writing for civil life, then numbers and accounting are part of it. The children don't come to school with a fear of numbers--that seems to be inculcated. The young girls, especially, have been role-typed to fear numbers.

Males aren't immune. More than a few male English professors exhibit symptoms of number-phobia. The problem is that a phobia tempts one to slander. The slanders, in turn, become reasons to dismiss as "depersonal" things you don't understand. (Can't trust those _____, they use numbers!) They are quantitative; we are qualitative. The odd notion that quantitative versus qualitative sorts out the sciences and mathematics from the humanities (that's us) is precisely the narrow dogmatism Jacob Bronowski worked so eloquently, so fervently, to dispell (successfully, I believe, if you lend him your time and thought) in The Ascent of Man.

Before I go too far afield, let me add that transactional writing, of course, represents neither science nor art. Art and science are acts of meditation, not transaction. Yet transactional activities are the seedbed for those acts of meditation. In that respect only, is the transactional the more basic. In the way that bread is somehow more basic. Basic but not sufficient.

Martin Mayer (remember his The Schools?) wonders in print why the schools hide the importance of accounting. The double entry system invented in the Renaissance is the invention that created the economic basis for modern life. There is a kind of economic illiteracy that again with stereotyped inaccuracy has been used to caricature women. Somehow accounting is supposed to be beyond the pale of culture and somehow all too sordid for dainty hands. Luckily for most households, the attitude is outgrown. Yet the taint remains. Dirty numbers. Oh my.

Suggestions for materials? Well, try Herbert Kohl's Math, Writing and Games (Random House, 1974). As for regular textbooks--the New Directions texts published by Harper and Row seem unafraid of counting and are willing to ask youngsters questions about what counting can do.

It was to train and enlarge the cadre of professional managers (the priesthood) that the first schools were set up. Other duties and functions have been given them, but the schools have never lost that initial function. One of the hallmarks of literacy is the notion of accountability--at first accountability to a ruler (often divine) for the way in which stores and land had been distributed, and finally it was extended in a way that asks the universe to account for itself. Literacy may have started by counting jars of grain, but it ended up counting the stars. The first kind of accountability yields, as a by-product, increased administrative control by a central authority over increasingly larger amounts of land and sea. The second kind of accountability leads, again as a by-product, to increased predictive control over certain kinds of natural phenomena.

Those powerful by-products, control over people and control over natural phenomena,

came about because of a mutation in the use of writing.

Begun as a device to keep records of stores, writing became itself a storage device. In the form of money, it "stored" labor. In the form of written epics, it "stored" literature and religious ideals.

When the marcher lords, the barbarians from the frontier lands of the city, became overlords of civilization, the scribes and priests became the literate aids who specialized in administrative procedures. They became the "secretaries of state, of labor or defense." They formed the layers of society that we would now term "middle management." In this context, writing stored something as powerful as religious ideals; Decisions--administrative decisions that could be used to control an increasingly complex culture. The basic form of administrative directives became the letter. Formalized for trade, the letter became the contract. Highly formalized, the letter became the table of laws. The first overlord to exploit fully this potentiality of writing was Hammurabi. We still have many of his letters and, of course, his famous code, with its emphasis on property rights. It is this code that became the basis for the Old Testament Law of Moses. And, of course, you might recall that administrative letters (the Epistles) form a large portion of the Christian New Testament.

Bringing those famous letters up-to-date is the business of biblical scholars and translators, but their business suggests some things to try in classrooms. The letters shown as models in writing texts are often innocuous. Not just bland, but bereft of any sense of power. No cries, nor challenges. Why not use letters that made a difference? Einstein's letter to Roosevelt? Why neuter the form? Want to

play it safe? Then let imagination loose. Models? Try the National Book Award winning Augustus by John Williams (Viking, 1972) or the exchange of letters from Marc Antony to Cicero, Cicero to Antony in Letters 2: Real and Imagined, edited by E. Graham Ward and Floren Harper--a paperback in Houghton Mifflin's Interaction program.

Anybody want to work out the answers to Paul's epistles? What did the Corinthians say in return? "Shucks, Paul,. . . ?"

On a less global level, try complaints. My son wrote his first spontaneous business letter when he was nine. He is fond of a breakfast cereal that combines bran flakes with raisins. One particular morning he could find only one raisin in the entire box of cereal. He was heatedly indignant. Somebody ought to tell them, he said, and so he did. It was a fine letter.

To go beyond complaining, the student needs to learn how to make a proposal: another form of transactional writing much in use that could be appropriately invoked fairly often in a student's career. When I use it in class I call it the "Bitch and Pitch." It's okay to complain, but then come up with a solution or two to the problem. A yelp, then help. Some of the newer journals on the library racks are helpful in suggesting topics--look at Small Town or Rain.

It is easy to forget, but along with invitations to the latest Reader's Digest Sweepstakes the post office really does sort out power. I remember it well. The letters are no longer sent; but back in my war the letter I received began: "Dear Sir: A committee composed of your friends and neighbors have selected you to represent them in the Armed. . . ." And I went. That was a long time ago. But the power remains. The means for distributing it were invented an even longer time ago than my war.

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To administer a large land area by letter means developing a postal system which in turn means developing a road system. This need was recognized and the first systems developed in the Middle East. Building upon an Assyrian base, the Persians, notably under Darius were the first to hold under full administrative control the land mass that joined the trade ports of the Indian Ocean with the trade ports of the Mediterranean. It is only under such control that the lands of the barbarians could be called civilized. Only under a complex administrative hierarchy that links trade, war, state, and religion, is civilization achieved and maintained.

The networks for distributing administrative control became channels for more than that, however. The cultures that became literate spread their art and religions along these networks, too. Hellenism, Christianity, and later, Islam spread their texts through the channels that distributed goods, services and control. If the area under control became dominantly literate, the old oral forms for the verbal arts were increasingly ignored and atrophy set it--and finally the epic is transformed into a written document. The price of literacy is the loss of public oral articulateness . . . unless deliberately preserved by the schools as in the rhetorical schools of Hellenistic and Roman cities. (The loss of an oral art as a price for literacy has been documented in the work of Milman Parry and his student Albert Lord. See Lord's The Singer of Tales. We can expect the same thing to happen in every "developing" country as literacy spreads.)

There is an analogous event in our culture. Electronic literacy is costing us private articulateness unless we find a shelter for it. And even then, it may

become as artificial a preservation as that of the second Sophistic . . . where the oral rhetoric became bombastic entertainment. A culture will always trivialize what it ceases to value.

More than the oral culture may be subverted by powerful public networks. Because the networks for distribution are most effective when most indifferent, they can spread texts that may, if welcomed, subvert the power that controls the network. (Or so at times, one hopes.) That the epistles of St. Paul were apparently readily sent and readily received is evidence of the effectiveness of the network. That they were welcomed is evidence of subversion. In our day the patterns of rigid local racism in the south were subverted by television--a medium which can be censored only at the sources of the network flow.[4]

Transactional writing is never "pure." It is always bound up with power, the power to administer--by the book; the power to engineer, to control, again often sadly but nonetheless powerfully, by the book. But unlike religious texts, these are books that are modified, changed, rewritten by those who have the ability to write. Unless you can write, you are bound, perhaps comfortably, perhaps hopelessly, by books you didn't write and have no chance of changing, nor skill to rewrite, nor any way to modify.[5] For all of these powers of commerce, of military prowess, of government, of learning exist in and because of writing. Nowadays--printed and typed writing.

I have ignored until now the second basic form that writing creates--the extended report. The typical response to an administrative letter is the report. It is born with the letter. It proliferates in all the ways that the letter does. The brilliant manager of men, Augustus Caesar, coupled the

report with the inventory and forged a tool for social management that we have with us to this day: the census. Recall the opening lines from the story of the birth of Christ as told by Luke:

> IN THOSE DAYS A DECREE WAS issued by The Emperor Augustus for a Registration to be made throughout the Roman World. This was the first registration of its kind; it took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria. For this purpose everyone made his way to his own town; and so Joseph went up to Judaea from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to register at the city of David, called Bethlehem.
>
> (The New English Bible; Oxford University Press, 1976.)

However, the idea of an inventory moved beyond the area of simple social management. The beginning of natural science was the discovery that one can inventory events and creatures in much the same way you inventory jars of grain or oil. The Egyptians and the Greeks took the inventory, added schemes of classification, and produced the catalogue . . . a new form which marks the beginning of scientific taxonomy. Simple taxonomies rigorously adhered to when studied by talented minds will yield insights as readily for the scientist as for the manager.

Because it began early and listed events longer, with more powerful mathematical models than any other budding science, astronomy was the first of the natural sciences to emerge apart from the concerns of the professional managers of

state and church. The emergence was delayed for centuries and when it happened it was not welcomed by the managers--as Galileo imprudently discovered.

The discovery of printing adds to the written word a consistent accuracy that was unattainable in a manuscript culture. Once an error has been found in a page proof--it can be corrected and it will stay corrected. Such stability in recording words and numbers was simply impossible when everything had to be copied by hand; each new copy would introduce new errors. For many kinds of work, the level of accuracy available in the manuscript culture was tolerable, but for the new international astronomy of Kepler, or for navigating the new sea routes to the Americas, or for mapping newly conquered territories of the age of European expansion, the errors of the manuscript culture were intolerable. The new findings depended upon charts and tables of ever-increasing accuracy, and only print could do it. As the navigational chart and the logarithmic table became more accurate, so the written word became increasingly more trustworthy. The trustworthiness of print meant things could be done reliably by the book. Doing things by the book proved so successful that reverence for print became part of what schools taught. With the new age of video that reverence is eroded for reasons I will come to shortly.

In an age of print standardized spelling is visibly, credibly a basic skill. In America, the conquering white communities developed a ritual that celebrated a skill that made print trustworthy; they called it the spelling bee.

The story of the report reveals clearly that its special powers reside in its trustworthiness and its utility. Behind a good report lies this situation: the author has

been somewhere, has done something, knows something the reader doesn't. There is a natural flow of information downhill from author to reader. Yet much of the report writing assigned in school works against that natural flow. To borrow a term from my colleague Don Cummings, it is writing trying to go uphill.

The students are writing about something the teacher knows better than they--in fact, the students learn in many a class never to even suggest that they might have strayed beyond the teacher's knowledge. That rhetorical situation is abnormal and produces strained and artificial language. The normal situation is to be telling somebody things they don't know, but need to know or want to know.

That is the situation behind much of good writing in Foxfire and its offspring. For in projects where high school students set out to salvage the lore of the old in their community, the information flow is downhill: from oldsters who experienced, to youngsters who listen, to others who should know. Similarly, the writing older children do for younger is often both successful and satisfying. Among the lessons to be learned from the history of the report is to avoid uphill writing, keep the information flow normal. The writing units in the Interaction program from Houghton Mifflin are usually models of natural flow.

By the way, if you want useful sets of directions for viewing an outdoor scene accurately, don't look in a writing text, but--where else?--in a good field manual for geologists. A set of good field manuals from similar natural sciences will do more to help train the young to be observant and thereby improve their descriptive writing than any of those rhetoric handbooks. You can't describe what you can't look at stead-

fastly. The steadiest look is what a field manual teaches. It is no accident, I suggest, that a number of our best descriptive writers have been trained by some of the more observant sciences. But I had better take care, I am moving away from the transactional once again into the meditative.

The pragmatic test of good transactional description: people reading the description will recognize the place, the thing, the person, even if they haven't seen it before. It is an aid to navigation; and it grew in power with the age of exploration: the age that gave us our notion of good plain style.

Political control, military power and the growth of scientific knowledge, especially of natural history and natural science, are from the start inextricably linked. Just as the state succeeded in wresting administrative control from the source that discovered it (the church); so, too, it has sought to wrest the power of science from those engaged in it. Also successfully. Perhaps inevitably. Perhaps rightfully. The voyages of Captain Cook and the explorations of Lewis and Clark are ready historical examples of this interlacing of varied powers and pressures.

None of the professions, none of the disciplines, and little of the power can exist solely as an oral event. The oral language, until very recently, was too ephemeral to build upon. A word spoken aloud may have lasting effects, but the word itself is a transient event.

It is from books, from books of transactional writing, that we learn our professions and our technologies. Oral language alone is unable to sustain that kind of learning. Many of the subjects of a civilized culture do not exist in any substantial degree as an oral phenomenon. A logarithmic table (or a tax table, for that matter) does

not exist orally.

But most importantly from a student's point of view, oral language alone is not the best way to study any but the most elementary subjects. This is especially true when the language of higher education is not native to you. And it is not native for most people. In America you can go from kindergarten to doctoral programs using only one language. We think that is normal. It is not. It may even be aberrant. A totally monolingual educational system is not the norm; it never has been. Except for a highly privileged few, booklearning has always meant learning another, often totally different, language. And for students studying in a language not native to them, the book is a blessing.

A Japanese student in one of my classes last year made the point charmingly. I had asked her to comment on how much more difficult it is to understand a lecture than a conversation in a newly learned language. She told the class how much she relied on texts and how much she had learned to appreciate those professors who chose texts well and used them thoroughly. She opened a book she had in front of her and in a small, but articulate gesture, she passed her hand over the opened book and explained, "The pages wait for me."

They wait for every student. The pages wait.

Because our circles of love and solidarity are drawn primarily with talk, the oral language might appear, at first, more friendly and more personal than writing. But that first impression has failed to notice that circles of hate and barricades of privilege are also built primarily with the oral language. The oral language gives us away. It tells on us. We are not one of them. The linguists have a name for those

social markers, but the story they go. the name from tells us all about what can happen:

> Jephthah then mustered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim, and the Gileadites defeated them. The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan and held them against Ephraim. When any Ephraimite who had escaped begged leave to cross, the men of Gilead asked him, 'Are you an Ephraimite?', and if he said, 'No', they would retort, 'Say Shibboleth.' He would say 'Sibboleth', and because he could not pronounce the word properly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. At that time forty-two thousand men of Ephraim lost their lives.
>
> Judges 12:4-6
> (The New English Bible. Oxford University Press, 1976)

Even within an intimate social circle, the oral language can be intolerant and unforgiving. For once something has been said, aloud, in full awareness of another person, it can never really be unsaid. The oral language offers little shelter. Certainly not for the lonely, nor the stubbornly honest. It gives most of us away too quickly, too often.

But writing, because the pages wait for you, can be a sheltering act. Words can be tried out in private, changed, never shown. You can carefully take out all those most socially shattering, risky, vulnerable

exposures of private feelings. You can make the words more impersonal. Written words are always very much your own and under your private control until you decide to let them go.

And that is a good thing, for part of the power of the impersonal standard language of public affairs and serious learning is precisely that with such matters one's own private self is not, or should not be, the issue. When participating in matters of public responsibility, neither one's sex, nor geographical origin, nor age, nor even one's own current emotional state should be an issue. All these sometimes distressing distractions can be screened out by the formalities of public writing. I think many of our youngsters need to learn the power of the ultimate privacy of public, written language. For it is a language that both accommodates and shelters the private self. Standard public writing is like that marvelous, imposing old mansion at 104 Irving Street in Cambridge remembered with affection by E. E. Cummings as a place that kept public things public and private things joyously private. Writing modeled on the public language of print is both accommodating and sheltering exactly because it leaves the private self unexposed. Unexposed, but not uninvolved.

Transactional writing is the writing of people accepting their social responsibilities and exercising their public powers. To imagine that the authors of such writing are uncommitted or uninvolved is to misunderstand public affairs . . . and, incidentally, to reduce the complexity of what humans can be.

Another of the reasons for the power in the Foxfire idea is that it doesn't strain to be "expressive"--yet the students are clearly involved with their subjects. They learned to listen to other voices and to

report them accurately. In learning how to communicate what those other voices had to say, they learned about their own, but without making their own personal selves an issue. The merging of the self into the job at hand is a mark of good transactional writing.

This kind of writing and its special powers can be friendly and sheltering, even (and perhaps especially) in those uses that seem at first formal and aloof. It is a lesson harder and harder to teach and difficult to learn as the powers of literacy become more covert, hidden in miniature circuits and large cathode ray tubes.

Reading is, in part, a kind of listening. Writing can do some of the things that speaking can do. Each medium of expression overlaps with others; but each medium also has its own unique and special virtues. Bit by binary bit, the special virtues that only writing offers are being hidden. The electronic age has let youngsters believe that literacy is less important now than in grandpa's day. It may be only a passing deception, for the truth is that the audio-video age rests on mounds of print, scripts, manuals, and invoices. But during these founding generations of the audio-video age, it has become harder for the young to discover and take pleasure in the special virtues of reading and writing.

What is happening now is that the foundation of literacy which supports our technology is growing less and less visible, less obvious to the young and to their community. It takes more work, more imagination to reach such youngsters, to let them learn how to participate in that hidden literacy. That is why all the tubes and wires and reels and all the "Sesame Streets" have made the writing teacher's job harder, not easier. Yet we must persist in our

audio-video age to teach the young to keep up the books that must be kept up if we are to maintain a decent, civilized technology.

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Appendix

What constitutes good writing in this realm? That's easy enough to answer. Good transactional writing is writing that can be trusted. The voice on the page is one you can believe; it is knowledgeable, and so it encourages you to believe it; and it justifies your faith in it. It delivers what it promises.

If I had to pick just one book for teachers that includes transactional writing and the important writing of drama, songs and stories in ways that seem most authentic, it would have to be James Moffett and Betty J. Wagner's, Student-Centered Language Arts and Reading, K-13: A Handbook for Teachers.

Footnotes

[1]James Britton, Language and Learning, (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1970) pp. 174-75. A Pelican paperback edition was published in 1972.

[2]Alexander Marshack, The Roots of Civilization, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1972).

[3]I. J. Gelb, The Study of Writing, Revised Edition, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963).

[4]See Ben H. Bagdikian, The Information Machines, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 17 ff.

[5]You can, of course, try to destroy what you are not allowed to control--an option that some have chosen. Some of us are always tempted to hit that which won't work for us. Like the man who finally, in exasperation, shot the candy machine.

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WHY TEACH WRITING?

Scratch a writing teacher and you may or may not find blood. But what you will find in most cases, I believe, is some kind of closet preacher or would-be megalomaniac. Of course the difficulties of actually teaching writing may cause us to feign modest goals--even to give up hopes for real progress--but deep down, most of us want the moon. People who end up as writing teachers were often most compelled, when going to school, by questions like "what is good and bad?" and "why do people do what they do?" and "how can I make the world better?" Yet all these incipient writing teachers--so goes my hypothesis--didn't major in religion because it seemed too ineffectual as a career goal or too tainted by religiosity; nor in psychology because it was too much a "social science," that is, a place where important questions are pursued too narrowly; nor into philosophy because these same important questions somehow got narrowed in a different way--dissipated or dessicated by a preoccupation with thinking about thinking. And so we ended up majoring in English--*faut de mieux*. And then *teaching* English--again *faut de mieux*. And finally--most of all *faut de mieux*--teaching writing.

Such then is the journey that starts with an adolescent hunger for answering the big questions and fixing the world and ends up with the teaching of writing to adolescents. It can feel like the journey through the guts of a worm. But the story can have a good ending if my personal analysis has any merit. I happen to believe--for the reasons that I spell out in what follows--

that writing can do more good than teaching or doing almost anything else.

(1) Teaching writing is possible. Not just teaching it, that is, but teaching it so students learn. Like most writing teachers, I have spent my share of time feeling my efforts have no effect at all. But I have discovered, finally, that it is indeed possible to teach people to write better. Of course I can't teach anyone; and I can't always teach students when I or someone else thinks they ought to learn; and the improvements I promote are not always what they or someone else had in mind. But if you grant those qualifications, there is no doubt in my mind that it is possible as a teacher to set up conditions that help most people write better and enjoy it too. It is important, especially on discouraging days, simply to remember that the task of teaching writing is a feasible one.

(2) Teaching writing is a service that students actually want. Commentators these days like to say that technology has undermined the very need for writing. I suspect this is false. Of course people often use the telephone when they could write a letter, or watch television when they could read a book, but nevertheless I suspect that a larger proportion of Americans use writing than did so one or two hundred years ago, and write more than their counterparts did one or two hundred years ago. (I remember when phonograph records first got wide circulation and people kept saying it would destroy all incentive for people to make music themselves. The opposite has occurred: there has been a renaissance of amateur chamber music.)

Many writing teachers don't experience the fact that students actually want to be taught to write. Writing is so often taught in a required course where students are asked to do pieces of writing they don't wish to do,

that as a result both students and teachers are liable to experience the teaching of writing exclusively as a transaction where one party is trying to sell something that the other party doesn't want to buy. Where I teach we don't have this kind of required course, and as a result I am permitted to see how most students feel hampered by their lack of writing skills and before long want to do something about it.*

Students may not always want to do the kind of writing I like best; perhaps they just want to work on lab reports or history essays for some other teacher--or on grant proposals or pornography. Or perhaps they want to write a book when they can't yet write a short essay. But most often they are simply tired of feeling scared or helpless or incompetent about writing.

I have learned to rejoice when a student has some pragmatic need for writing I can help satisfy. I love it when there is some out-of-school situation or some other teacher who sets a demand that I can help the student satisfy. When I was more obsessed with my own teaching agenda I didn't notice how often students had their own pragmatic writing needs. I can then be an ally helping them satisfy their writing needs. It feels good that students are grateful and feel I have

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*I do not wish to get into the question here of whether writing courses should be required or not. I recognize strong arguments for required writing courses. And I certainly affirm the need for required writing assignments as part of courses in, say, history or whatever; that's part of doing history. I merely point out a drawback that results from teaching writing in required courses.

made a difference in their lives. But in addition I discover I can then more easily persuade them to try some of the nonpragmatic writing tasks I am interested in peddling. For example there are many students I cannot get to do freewriting till I've paid the dues of helping them write a lab report. Theoretically they should be doing freewriting first. It would help their lab reports. But often I have to help with the lab reports before they will entertain the notion that I'm not crazy for wanting them to do freewriting.

(3) Teaching writing can teach more than just writing. This and the rest of my reasons for teaching writing are ways I think I can affect people's lives and consciousness.

Teaching writing can help people think better. It helps them figure things out and answer hard questions. This is not news. Therefore I will just briefly mention two ways I see it happen. First, I can help students simply to <u>find</u> more of their own perceptions, thoughts, and feelings when they are faced with a hard question. This is half the battle. Second, I can help them actually think better--to improve their use of strict and not-so-strict forms of reasoning. In practice, this usually means helping them learn better to feel the difference between thinking and feeling and how to decide which one is appropriate at any given point. I see myself having more lasting effect on the cognitive behavior of students when I teach writing than when I teach anything else.

(4) Teaching writing helps people make writing a part of their lives. When I help people make progress in writing, I see again and again that I have started them on an activity that they keep up. It's as though I've planted seeds. Students often cannot <u>prevent</u> themselves, after a while, from

keeping journals and doing freewriting. Some cannot even prevent themselves from going so far as to write for publication. They are terrified at the process and they hurt when they get rejection notices, but they cannot help themselves. Writing has come to be an activity of saying things to themselves and to others, and they cannot help wanting to say more and more to themselves and to talk to more and more people.

When I help people use writing freely and extensively, their writing goes through stages of growth and change. Students often tell me later of surprises they've had because of what their writing led them to. This use of writing leads to self-knowledge; self-knowledge not just as a product, but as an ongoing process. Writing, in short, leads to growth--to development and change. That is, when people write according to the processes I propose, they often end up not just expressing their thoughts and feelings better, but changing them and ending up with different thoughts and feelings. Writing helps people work through their preoccupations and obsessions faster and come out the other side--not stay stuck so long in one life stance.

(5) Teaching writing is a way to help people use processes and strategies in their lives that are especially important and--in our culture--sometimes difficult to learn. I can help people use intuition and metaphorical thinking. I can help them learn to block the impulse toward premature closure--to learn to start journeys without always knowing where they will end up. One student spoke of learning not to worry so much about beginnings; "I'm 23 and so afraid of making mistakes in life, making the wrong move, choosing the wrong major, the wrong mate, the wrong tickets to the wrong concert, I found myself not choosing at all, just very dully

living from day to day". I guess I'm really talking about learning to use and trust one's organic processes of growing and unfolding--not just in writing but in the rest of one's life.

One of the deepest and most powerful organic processes is the natural dialectic that seems to function in growing things. Through teaching writing I can help students understand that if they want to learn to be more incisive and logical as an editor of their own writing, they may need first to learn to write faster and looser without editing at all. And then to generalize: if they want to get better at X, they may get there faster through Y. If they want to get closer to someone, they may need to express negative feelings more (if not to that person, at least to an appropriate listener). If they want to learn to relax better, they may need to learn to work more intensely. The process of dialectic unfolding can have various patterns. Sometimes it's a matter of learning that things can't be hurried: if one is struggling unsuccessfully to learn something, real breakthroughs may not occur till one stops trying so hard--till one gives up a little. Sometimes it's a matter of learning to be comfortable with chaos and contradictory activities: learning to work on two different sections of the same paper or task at the same time; learning to give in at the same time as working on being more assertive. We are apt to feel as though our lives and work should be orderly, logical or neat, and to struggle ineffectually to make them so. We may lose thereby the benefit of some of our greatest power. This isn't a matter of abandoning rational thought and planning: rather of being more sophisticated as we think and plan. This all may sound far away from writing, but it is just such processes of self-management students must

learn if they are to produce their best writing.

(6) There is one particular change of consciousness that is especially important to me as an "outcome" of the teaching of writing: empowerment. That is, many people are tricked into feeling more powerless and helpless than they are because of ways in which they were brought up and because of patterns in our culture. They are tricked into feeling they cannot learn to do things which they can in fact learn; tricked into feeling they cannot help make genuine changes in their life and in society which they can in fact make. These helpless and powerless feelings pervade many different areas of people's lives--areas which are often unrelated to writing. But these feelings nevertheless usually cluster with great force around the process of writing. Most people seem to feel strongly they cannot learn to write freely and copiously; and almost everyone seems to feel they cannot learn to write powerfully--to write words that actually make a difference to readers. A writing teacher can show them that these feelings are wrong--are a trick played on them by complex circumstances. When people learn how to keep these feelings from holding them back in their writing, they move a long way toward learning how to keep them from holding them back in many other areas of their lives. People learn through writing, in short, that they are intelligent, that they can trust themselves, and that they have power.

All these, then, seem to me important reasons for teaching writing. Some readers may feel that I must not <u>really</u> be interested in teaching writing if so many of my goals do not involve writing. But here too I insist on the validity of a dialectical view of things: I don't have to choose <u>between</u> writing and, say, power. I do better at

empowerment the more directly I focus on writing; and I enhance my teaching of writing the more I inform it with my "ulterior" motive of empowerment.

What is Good Writing?

Introductory fantasy. Imagine a behavioral reduction of this expansive question. Imagine calling good writing only that writing we would actually read by choice--read, that is, without having to be paid or without some personal or professional obligation. (As teachers we are likely to find ourselves calling good or implying to be good pieces of student writing or published writing we would never in fact read by choice; student writing that is much better than the last piece or that answers the question well; published writing that is important for any number of reasons.) My behavioral test may not give us a definition of good writing for all seasons, and it is not exactly the definition on good writing I wish you to entertain in what follows. Nevertheless I suggest it as a way to jiggle loose the criteria we are likely to use by habit as we read student writing for pay.

* * *

There is a particular kind of good writing that I want to stress. I call it writing with voice. My interest in voice represents an interest in power; the power that makes readers keep reading even if they don't like the writing or agree with it, the power that makes them actually listen to the writer, be affected by the words, and remember what was said. Needless to say most writing, even most published writing, lacks this power.

Writing with voice entangles the sound and energy and texture of the person in the words on the page. It conveys the presence of the writer to the reader.

Obviously writing with voice isn't the same as what most people mean by good writing. People usually think of good writing as containing good content--i.e., new or true or important things to say; or embodying good form--i.e., beautiful, clever or well organized ways to say them. Or both. I don't wish to quarrel with or remove these usual definitions of good writing. But I wish to add another.

Thus writing might have the power that I call voice, yet many readers of good judgment may conclude that it is terrible--all wrong or a complete mess--and may not even finish reading it. Yet those readers will remember and be affected by what they did read. Somehow the words will have gotten themselves experienced by the reader. On the other hand, a piece of writing may lack this power, yet many readers of good judgment may conclude it is excellent. But in this case the words will not have got through as well as they could have. In the succeeding days or weeks the readers will not remember them or think of them or be affected by them. Or else perhaps the words did get through to some readers and had a big effect on them, but it was because those readers had a special interest in this writing or a special desire to invest themselves in what was there. In short, the words without voice had little effect except on readers who supplied extra energy and experience of their own.

As far as I can figure out there is nothing objective in style or content that characterizes writing with voice. It's not a matter of the words conforming to some model of strong or powerful writing. It seems entirely a matter of the words bearing

some right relationship to the writer--of the words ringing true.

I don't always like the writing where I sense voice. And when I give students feedback on where in their writing I sense them using or starting to use voice--an obviously subjective judgment on my part--it seems to help. It doesn't help their writing grow closer to my taste, necessarily. Rather this feedback seems to hasten the process of students investing themselves more in their writing. When I succeed in giving accurate feedback to students about where there is voice, I seem to touch a sensitive nerve. And when students succeed in doing more writing with voice they tend to embark on a new stage of development and growth in their writing, new energies are released, and writing becomes more important in their lives. Often students who can never think of anything to write about start having lots to say when I can find short passages of voice in their writing and get them to do more of whatever they were doing at those moments of writing. (I am presently engaged in writing more about voice. It is a complicated matter. What I write will eventually be part of a new book about writing to be published by Oxford University Press.)

* * *

I think, then, that an emphasis on voice should be added to the other definitions of good writing--definitions that stress good form or good content or both. Indeed I think an emphasis on voice is more helpful than an emphasis on the others for the teaching of writing. Nevertheless, when it comes to the teaching of writing, I believe it is a mistake to give much emphasis to any notion of good writing (unless the students are already very confident and skilled as

writers). I believe that the main reason why the teaching of writing is so often ineffectual is because it results in students worrying too much about whether their writing is good or not. Students become paralyzed or wooden or stupid by always trying to imitate some standard of goodness in all their writing. If people tried to speak well every time they spoke, they would end up blocked in that medium too. If you are really interested in good quality writing, then you must make it your immediate goal that people write copiously, not well. Only when people begin to use writing on other occasions than when it is required--only when they have written for diverse purposes over a period of years--will they eventually come to produce good writing.

Those who overstress quality or excellence in the teaching of inexperienced students are kidding themselves. They cannot really be interested in good writing; only in fostering outward mannerisms which seem to characterize good writing but are really epiphenomenal. If you put all of a student's writing under the gun of quality evaluation, you can hope only to produce <u>correct</u> or <u>acceptable</u> writing, not good writing. Without trying to belittle acceptable or correct writing, I believe that when it is produced by this process, it isn't just different from good writing, it actually retards the eventual attainment of writing that really deserves the name good--writing, that is, that someone might actually be willing to read without pay.

This injection of the time dimension--this standing back and seeing how many years or how large a portion of a lifetime it takes to produce good writing--forces us to take a <u>developmental</u> view and to distinguish the difference between learning and development. Learning means getting new information,

ideas, skills, or behaviors; development means moving on to a newer, more complex stage of organization in the organism's growth. (Freud, Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg all suggest developmental models. For a powerfully useful developmental picture of learning, see William Perry's Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years.) A developmental point of view insists that organisms go through stages of successively more complex organization and that certain ideas or skills or behaviors cannot be learned till the organism has attained the proper stage of development. The most vivid way to illustrate the difference between learning and development is to point out that when someone actually starts to move from one stage to a higher one, specific performances often deteriorate. The person is beginning to use higher but as yet imperfectly coordinated levels of organization for operations he formerly did without a hitch at the lower level of organization. I find this happens in writing. I find many students don't get past certain levels of good writing unless they go through what seems to be a new stage of development--a new organization of skills; and as part of that transition their writing often seems to deteriorate in various ways. Sometimes they seem to have to write lots of downright terrible stuff on their way to a new level of complexity or sophistication or control. Therefore, in any long range quest for quality in writing, I believe it's crucial to resist any impulse for short range improvement. I do my best to ensure that students write a lot, that they learn to enjoy writing, and that they can apply it to the pragmatic uses they themselves have--whether it is diary writing or grant proposals or essays for their history teacher. But then I try to do a lot of standing back and encouraging the

writing to be how it is and to follow its own path. For perhaps the most important thing about developmental change is that you cannot program it or steer it; you cannot make it follow your path or your timetable; the only way to speed progress is to have a good idea of what its path is liable to be and to try to clear the way a little bit for movement in these directions.

If I am right in all this, what are the implications for how teachers should give feedback to student writing? The issue is too complex to treat fully here but I think there are three trustworthy principles. (1) Feedback is not always necessary or even desirable; writing for the sake of sharing--with teacher and peers--rather than for the sake of getting feedback tends to help students enjoy the writing process and take it seriously. Writing only for the sake of sharing helps students learn to treat writing as a process of actually saying things to a real audience. (2) Give feedback--and arrange things in general--with the goal of getting students to write copiously rather than necessarily well. (3) The most helpful kind of feedback is not commentary on the quality of writing vis a vis some standard of excellence but rather commentary on what happened to the reader during the act of reading.

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